

# DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 21 No. 12

December 1953

Whole No. 255

## A TWO-GUN BLUFF

by J. H. Ambruster



Cover of a rare Frank Reade Library published 1892 to 1896 by Frank Tousey  
Above is No. 15 published December 31, 1892 (from the LeBlanc collection).



**A TWO-GUN BLUFF**

By J. H. Ambruster

From motion picture "Westerns" one would get the idea that almost everyone outside of large cities west of the Mississippi or Missouri rivers, especially the more hardened residents of mining camps or sparsely settled ranch areas, are in the habit of going about with a brace of large calibre shooting irons. Such probably was the case in pioneer days of homesteading or the exciting times of gold rushes. In the absence of organized law such people were on their own defensive and found it necessary to be prepared for personal safety and protection in unexpectedly coming face to face with some wild animal or savage Indians who looked on the coming of the white man as an invasion of their home territory. With increasing influx of white population, modern highways and means of transportation, such conditions have practically come to an end. Daily news reports would indicate that in some of our large cities there are about as many gun-toting people as can be found among an equal number of their ilk in the far west.

Ranch life has undergone great changes since the days of the open range, when herds of cattle roamed at will and often became mixed with other herds, instead of as now, keeping livestock within owners' legal bounds as prescribed by law. Ranch-

ing nowadays is on a much larger scale, as also are mining operations, and this has diminished frequent quarrels of earlier times between individual ranchers or prospectors.

Our story revolves around the experiences of a lad who through the reading of Dime Novels acquired a taste of life in the great open spaces, concluded to follow the advice of Horace Greeley, to go west and grow up with the country. Leaving a comfortable eastern home he spent some time on a cattle ranch, (considered large in those days, the operations stretching over an area of some twenty-five or thirty miles); later he found his way to a gold mining district. In both instances he came in contact with rough and ready men. He noticed the absence of revolvers, which he had imagined would be in evidence everywhere. Contrary to general belief, these men were kind, generous and harmless one to another, unless one was caught in an evil act, such as horse stealing, when he was quickly discredited and proper punishment meted.

Placer mining differs from lode mining in that the precious metal is gleaned from above ground in the open, whereas in lode mining it is necessary to dig and tunnel deep into the hills, extract ore from depths and put it through refining processes. Placer mining is operated on a large scale by hydraulic pressure obtained

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by tapping small streams miles distant, and leading the water through ditches and flumes to a high elevation, where it is forced through giant nozzles against top soil to be carried away over paved and creviced sluices to the river below, perhaps a mile or two distant, after allowing the heavier precious metal in small particles, sometimes so small it is known as "flour gold", to settle in the crevices, later to be reclaimed, refined and smelted into gold bricks for shipment to the U. S. mint. Such operations must of necessity be handled by a large company, usually after purchasing and consolidating numerous small claims operated in primitive ways by individual operators, (or prospectors).

In a western city the job of night-watchman and time-keeper was offered to this young man. Asked what were the duties of a night-watchman, he was told that was simple: to "turn the water on and off, and see that no one robbed the sluices". To him "turning the water on and off" meant to sit in a cabin during the night, reading a Dime Novel, and occasionally turning a spigot, as in a city kitchen. He soon found this to mean: trudging up and down the gulch or mountain side at night, locating a water gate the size of a cellar door, standing on a single plank bridge across a roaring stream of water, and by use of a long pole lever prying up this gate, or in reverse driving it home by use of a heavy mallet; the stream being strong enough to carry him to its confluence with the river should he miss his footing and fall into the flume. Distasteful as he found this job to be, he did not want to be a "quitter", and stuck to it.

Leaving the city at night by rail, he arrived at his rail destination almost two miles above sea level, about six a.m. Saloons there were several as in all mining towns. Usually they were known as "hotels", having a room or two above the refreshment parlor below. Noticing one of these he concluded that that was a place for breakfast. The place was not open; hesitating about his next

move he paced up and down the board sidewalk when suddenly a gruff voice from a quickly opened window asked in unprintable language what he wanted waking people up at that hour? When told that he wanted breakfast, he was ordered in not very polite language to get out of there and come back in a couple of hours. To wait, was out of the question, and learning by some means how to reach his quest, he proceeded to walk up a trail, in a gulch between two mountain ridges. About a mile distant came a settlement of three residences and a barn, homes of the manager, the teamster and blacksmith. The first question asked by the manager: "Well, you're here; did you bring your bed?" He did not mean, as I understood, a bedstead and equipment, but simply a roll of blankets. Asked about eating, was told: "Down at the village or up at the boarding house", about a mile farther on where 75 workmen had meals and slept in a large tent. Asked where the former watchman slept and ate, was taken to a one-room log cabin, furnished by an open fireplace, bedstead of rough timber, no springs or bedding, empty soap box for a chair, and that was about all. Asked what predecessor did about eating, was told, "He batched." Newcomer said he also would batch. "O.K.", said the manager, "Hitch up the sorrel to the buckboard, see Jim, the storekeeper in the village, tell him I sent you and to fit you up with blankets, tin dishes, a side of bacon, crackers and whatever else you want, and charge it to me." No package goods in those days; no sliced bacon; community cracker barrel and cheese-roll, permissible for any lounge to help himself to a cheese sandwich; sugar, coffee and such sold by weight as ordered.

After getting settled and a few days' acquaintance with surroundings, which was to include all-night jaunts up and down the gulch, amid rocks, boulders, open prospect holes, ditches and flumes, he was told to come around at dark and be initiated for the night job. In the city he had equipped himself with a second-



hand small calibre revolver, but when he met the manager that evening he was handed a double-barreled shotgun and a 38 automatic revolver. "What are these for?" was asked. Reply: "Walk up and down the gulch and among the diggings from now 'til daylight; if you see anyone, take a shot at him". These instructions were not taken literally; if they had there might have been a dead person or two, one probably the watchman, in the near future.

A few evenings after these orders the Manager said that they intended to clean up (extract the gold) from one of the sluices in order to get funds for a coming pay day. The watchman was to stay close to that place the entire night. As midnight approached, slight noises were heard as though some one was carefully treading over the loose gravel. It was a very cloudy night and impossible to see any object more than a very few feet off. The habit of the watchman was not to carry his shotgun on his shoulder, (soldier-wise), but under his arm pointing downward, with fingers close to trigger, ready to be hoisted in case of emergency. In this way he stealthily went in the direction of the noise. Soon he found himself face to face with some one; up went his gun to the chin of the supposed intruder, with the command "Halt!" only to find a large 45 Colt under his own chin. Had he acted on his instructions, "If you see anyone take a shot at him," there might have been a dead manager, a dead watchman, or both. As it was, the manager was checking on whether his employee was on the job, and he had a definite response, but probably spoiled a good Dime Novel story.

However, this worked out better than anticipated. This thrilling experience placed the watchman in good standing and resulted in a better daytime job, with increased pay, and return to the work the following season. (By season is meant, summer's

work, as outdoor workings of this sort, must necessarily cease during the winter months).

Much more could be said about the novel and interesting experiences of this job, which was neither sought nor wanted at the outset, but the exciting episode recounted above stands out as a highlight of those thrilling times.

During the following season the watchman's duties were transferred to more interesting work, including the making of gold bricks, gleaning, refining and smelting the gold and preparing it for the mint, but that is another story, with other exciting, but less dangerous experiences.

### NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

By the time this goes to press, our faithful editor Edward T. Le-Blanc and Florence Roy of Somerset, Mass., will be all hitched up, or should I say shackled for life? They were to be married Nov. 7th and we all wish them the best of everything, you bet. Once he gets settled down, he is hoping to be able to spend a little more time on the Roundup, and other things that he wasn't able to do before, and I know he will. They were to be married at the St. Louis of France Church on Buffington St., in Swansea, Mass.

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Runs, bound without wrappers, of Munro's Ten Cent Novels, Irwin's American Novels, Wm. H. Chaney's American Novels, Chapman's Sunnyside Series and The American News Company's Fireside Series would also be of interest.

**The Haunted Wood** by Edward S. Ellis.

(No. 3. Sunnyside Series; Chapman & Company, 1866).

**Jack's Horseshoe or What the Waugroo Bitters Did**, by Edward S. Ellis.

(No. 9. Fife and Drum Series, National Temperance Society and Publishing House, 1883).

**Carmina the Beautiful**, by Edward S. Ellis.

(No. 130. Arm Chair Series, F. M. Lupton, 1901)

**The Flower of the Forest**, by Boylston Randolph, M.D.

(No. 19. Fireside Series, American News Coy., 1866).

**The Eye of Hercules**, by J. G. Bethune.

(No. 5. Crescent Library, Price-McGill, 1892).

**The F. Cipher**, by J. G. Bethune.

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**The Student Cavaliers**, by Edward S. Ellis.

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## HENTY HINTS #8

Wm. B. Poage

505 S. Newport Ave., Tampa 6, Fla.

Collectors of Henty books I suppose are like many collectors of other writers. Some going for a few selected titles. Some for first editions only and even some asking for copies published only by certain publishers.

Some like myself go all out on Henty, wanting all his books and all his short stories and even any books relating to him.

Some collectors just ask for good copies not caring for either firsts or fine copies. Others ask for both Blackie and Scribner editions. As for myself I only desire one of these. Other collectors will not take any of the changed titles.

This brings me to the point of those changed titles. I expect most collectors are of course aware of the many changed titles but many might not realize just how many of them there were.

Thirteen of his books were published under two titles. Then there are three books published under three titles and believe it or not one story came out under five titles.

The first short story published and taken from one of his books was published under three titles. So far in my check I have found that twenty-four short stories have been taken from his books and published elsewhere.

Publishers of magazines and annuals have cashed in on Henty for a great number of years. This making and publishing of short stories has been going on from 1881 to 1948.

Seven of Henty's books have been published in abridged form.

As our knowledge now stands, a collector of Henty if he went all out and discounting duplicates and different editions there is no doubt his collection would reach three hundred. As for myself, my collection has gone over two hundred and have more than fifty titles on my want list and we pick up now one from time to time. It seems no end to Henty.

Now if a collector should desire

not only all titles but different editions and different publishers I have very little doubt that ones collection would reach a thousand.

I have a list of thirty-six English publishers, thirty-nine American, five in Canada and eleven in other lands.

We know that Blackie published eighty-three books, Scribner more than seventy, Donohue I know forty-three, and A. L. Burt just about as many. Then just consider the many publishers who published only two or three. Well if you want to take this on you had better begin building shelves four sides of your room and run them up to the ceiling.

With different editions, it would run one crazy. I know that Blackie had four different editions, Scribner six or seven, Donohue five and Burt four. Most publishers at least two and many published both in cloth and paper covers.

Well the hunt is still on and Happy Hunting.

All the above figures subject to anyones correction.

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